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SUBJECT: EU RESPONSE TO DEMARCHE ON DPRK FOOD AID

REF: SECSTATE 229053

Classified By: USEU DEVELOPMENT COUNSELOR PATRICIA J. LERNER, REASONS 1
.4 B,D

¶1. (C) Summary: Development Counselor presented reftel demarche to Xavier Guillou at DG AIDCO Food Security Unit and Maria Castillo-Fernandez, DG RELEX Desk Officer for DPRK. Both were receptive to demarche, had been in North Korea recently, largely agreed with US assessment of issues with some nuanced differences, and welcomed offer of a dialogue on this critical issue following the November 13 Troika visit to Pyongyang. End Summary.

¶2. (C) DG AIDCO's Food Security Unit person responsible for North Korea, Xavier Guillou, is just back in Brussels from a three week mission in DPRK. Guillou largely agrees with the US assessment of the situation in North Korea. He noted the EC has not provided food aid for the past two years based on a similar assessment of needs, access and competing priorities, and given large bilateral contributions from China, South Korea and Japan. As a result the EC has found it more cost-effective to focus on agricultural rehabilitation (providing agricultural materials) and food security programs worth euros 8 million in 2003 and euros 5 million in 2004. The budget is not likely to increase to the historically high levels of 1995 -96. On access and monitoring, Guillou agreed the situation was extremely difficult because of the specific features of the distribution system developed in North Korea over the past fifty years. Guillou suggested donor responses are not always based on needs alone, given the "massive food aid program" which the Japanese are providing, which in his view has little to do with "need." Guillou believes the situation is far different from 1996-97 because there has been a limited recovery in agricultural production and therefore the EC is not convinced food aid is necessarily the most adequate tool given the limitations of monitoring, especially after ten years.

¶3. (C) DG RELEX Desk Officer for DPRK Maria Castillo-Fernandez is well versed in the US position on food aid to DPRK and very much aware of the situation in the DPRK since the September 15 shift in policy on monitoring food aid and the humanitarian situation. An EU Regional Directors-level Troika will be traveling to Pyongyang November 13 and will raise the issue of monitoring food aid, which is high on the EU agenda. That said, the EC is not aware of any practical implications for EU NGOs as a result of DPRK policies. Castillo-Fernandez was in DPRK recently and visited a number of sites. Her view was that WFP access has increased significantly over the last two years. Her sense was that the monitoring has perhaps been too intrusive and culturally insensitive. Questions such as "what do you eat?" and "what's in your cabinet?" have provoked strong reaction from the local beneficiaries who do not want people asking such questions in DPRK, any more than they would like that in Europe. That said, Castillo-Fernandez acknowledged that high ranking DPRK officials have used this local reaction to impose security restrictions. She seemed to think the September discussion of whether there needed to be a CAP (Consolidated Appeals Process) or not, was not important as there are plenty of countries where we work without a CAP. Politically, DPRK knows development assistance won't come until the nuclear issues are resolved. In terms of programming assistance, the EC does not view DPRK as an emergency humanitarian situation, but rather as a post-emergency transitional situation where development assistance may be more what they need.

¶4. (C) Castillo-Fernandez noted there are many issues to discuss, and proposed to take up some of them in the context of the November 9 visit to Brussels of US Special Envoy Joseph DeTrani. She further suggested more detailed food aid dialogue following the November 13 Troika visit to Pyongyang, when the EU will have a better idea of the situation.

SCHNABEL